

Women Spies and Soldiers

Diary Entry

August 12, 1861

I have done it! I have cut my hair and glued on a false mustache and goatee. And I must say in all honesty that I am a rather handsome fellow!

Why the disguise? It is simply that I refuse to sit idly by while my husband marches off to war. Naturally, he refused my plea to accompany him when he left, so this is the only way of accomplishing what otherwise would have been impossible.

I have been practicing walking with a swagger and talking in a deep voice. I am even close to mastering that fine, manly art of spitting! Lieutenant Harry Buford has been born!

The above diary entry could have been written by a determined young wife names Loreta Velazquez, who disguised herself as a man and ventured forth to join her Confederate officer husband. Her masquerade was so good that she organized a battalion of volunteers.

In her writings later in life, Loreta Velazquez probably exaggerated her exploits and deeds in the war. But certain aspects are plausible. For example, she may well have served as her husband's aide until he was killed in an accident, after which she was reputed to have taken part in the First Battle of Bull Run.

Loreta Velazquez was but one of an estimated 400 women who disguised themselves and fought in the Civil War. Many others served as spies. Space permits the telling of only a few of their stories, but each is interesting and filled with intrigue and excitement.

Sara Edmonds was a Canadian girl who seemed to be a "tomboy" from the start. When she was 20, she ran away from home rather than face an arranged marriage. Disguised as a man and calling herself Franklin Thompson, she went to Connecticut and then on to Michigan. It was while in Michigan that she enlisted in an infantry regiment as a "male" nurse.

Edmonds went through basic training as a regular recruit. Her skills at shooting and riding impressed her male cohorts, who never suspected she was a woman. Like others of her sex, she escaped detection because of the simple fact that soldiers in those days slept in their clothes and seldom bathed. Later in the war, Sara became a Union spy and gained a measure of fame for her daring. One of her most memorable feats was when she darkened her skin and posed as a black laborer behind Confederate lines. She not only gathered vital information on the enemy's plans and defenses but exposed a counterspy as well. Like Loreta Velazquez, she later wrote about her wartime experiences.

One of the most famous female spies of the Civil War was Belle Boyd. Her career in espionage began after she shot and killed a Yankee soldier who raised an American flag over her home in Martinsburg, Virginia. She was 17 at the time, and it wasn't long before she was supplying secret information to the Army of Northern Virginia.

Unlike most spies, Belle was so brazen that she wrote her secret messages in longhand and even signed her name to them. Not surprisingly, she was arrested and jailed a number of times. Her Federal prison guards were totally exasperated by her behavior. She infuriated everyone by singing Southern songs and hanging a picture of Jefferson Davis in her cell. It's reported that when guards came to her cell to quiet her, she screamed at them and swept the floor with a broom each time they left.

Toward the end of the war, Belle was arrested while traveling aboard a Southern blockade runner. With her capacity to charm men, she convinced the young naval officer in whose charge she was placed, to run away with her. They fled to England, where they were later married. Belle wrote of her exploits after the war and toured England and the US giving lectures.

A famous Union spy was Elizabeth VanLew, known to her neighbors in Richmond as Crazy Betsy. Her mansion became a hideout for Federal soldiers who had escaped from Confederate prison. Van Lew also used black servants to carry coded messages through to Union lines. Without question, her most daring move was when she succeeded in planting one of her former slaves in the home of none other than Jefferson Davis! General Grant recognized her services to the Union by appointing her postmistress of Richmond after the war.

Text Title: Women Spies and Soldiers

Vocabulary: (consider content and academic vocabulary)

Term	What I Know	Student Friendly Definition	My Definition After Learning	Graphic
disguised				
battalion				
counterspy				
exploits				
plausible				
exasperated				

Background Knowledge:

- What critical content do students need to know before reading this article?
- How will I convey that critical content to students?

Civil War / role of women in this time period
What's a spy

Preview Text:

- Article discusses 4 women and their roles in the Civil War
- Primary source document – diary entry leads the article

Strategy: Read - Stop – Respond

Model

Guided Practice

More Guided Practice

Independent

Directions:

- Divide the reading into four chunks by women and their story.
- Read one chunk at a time. Identify who the woman was, what she did, and support your information with evidence from the text.
- Summarize the key supporting details and main idea for each chunk in your own words by explaining how each woman contributed to the Civil War efforts.

Column 1 Main Idea	Column 2 Key Supporting Details
Chunk 1	
Loreta Velazquez Who was she and what did she do?	Evidence from diary entry: • • Evidence from article: • •
Summary of Chunk 1 How did Loreta Velazquez contribute to the Civil War efforts?	

Chunk 2**Sara Edmonds****Evidence from article:****Who was she and what did she do?**

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Summary of Chunk 2**How did Sara Edmonds contribute to the Civil War efforts?****Chunk 3****Belle Boyd****Evidence from article:****Who was she and what did she do?**

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Summary of Chunk 3**How did Belle Boyd contribute to the Civil War efforts?****Chunk 4****Elizabeth Van Lew****Evidence from article:****Who was she and what did she do?**

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Summary of Chunk 4**How did Elizabeth Van Lew contribute to the Civil War efforts?****Using the summaries from all chunks, construct a summary of the roles women played in the Civil War.**

- * Benchmark
- * MAP reports
- * IRPs
- * scheduling

Progress Monitor (?)
monthly